

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4888

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN JOSE 3000

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, CS

SUBJECT: ELECTRICAL WORKERS STRIKE IMMINENT

REF: SAN JOSE 2914

SAN JOSE 2939

1. NEW DEVELOPMENTS DURING THE PAST DAYS IN THE CONTINUING DISPUTE BETWEEN THE ELECTRICAL WORKERS UNION (SITET) AND THE AUTONOMOUS GOVERNMENT COSTA RICAN ELECTRICITY INSTITUTE (ICE) OVER THE DISMISSAL TWO MONTHS AGO OF EIGHT UNION ACTIVISTS PROVOKED THE DEMOCRATIC-AFFILIATED UNION ON AUGUST 22 TO PUBLICLY THREATEN TO STRIKE AUGUST 27, IF ICE FAILS TO REINSTATE THE EIGHT BY THAT DATE. ACCORDING TO THE LOCAL PTI REPRESENTATIVE, SITET HAS JUST LEARNED THROUGH AN ICE LAWYER THAT THE ICE BOARD OF DIRECTORS HAS NO INTENTION OF REHIRING THE EIGHT, FIRED FOR THEIR ROLES IN THE JUNE SITET STRIKE, DESPITE A DETERMINATION BY THE MINISTRY OF LABOR LEGAL DEPARTMENT, DELIVERED TO SITET AND ICE ON AUGUST 17, THAT ICE'S STATED REASON FOR THEIR DISMISSAL (SABOTAGE AND NEGLIGENCE) WERE UNFOUNDED.

2. MORE IMPORTANT IN FORCING SITET'S HAND, HOWEVER, WAS
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THE AUGUST 20 ISSUANCE OF A STRIKE CALL, TO TAKE EFFECT

ON AUGUST 28, BARRING ICE'S ACQUISITION TO SIMILAR DEMANDS, BY SITET'S RIVAL UNION AT ICE, THE ASDEWCE, WHICH HAS HERETOFORE NOT BEEN A PARTY TO THE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN ICE AND SITET. ASDEICE WAS LONG CONSIDERED A COMPANY UNION AND, IN FACT, STILL IS IN MANY WAYS. HOWEVER, RECENTLY THE UNION HAS FALLEN UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF MARIO DEVANDAS, MEMBER OF THE EXTREME LEFTIST COSTA RICAN SOCIALIST PARTY. APPARENTLY, DVEANDAS INSTIGATED ASDEICE'S STRIKE ULTIMATUM SEIZING UPON THE DISMISSAL ISSUE AS A MEANS FOR HIS UNION TO MAKE POINTS WITH THE WORKERS AT THE EXPENSE OF SITET. ONCE DONE, SITET, WHICH HAD AGREED WITH THE MINISTRY OF LABOR TO KEEP THE NEGOTIATIONS OUT OF THE PRESS, WAS, IN THE WORDS OF THE PTTI REPRESENTATIVE, "TRAPPED" INTO CALLING ITS

OWN STRIKE. THE SITET LEADERS FEARED THAT THE WORKERS, OUTRAGED BY THE FIRINGS, WOULD FOLLOW THE ASDEICE CALL TO STRIKE EVEN IF SITET ISSUED NONE. THUS, THE SITET LEADERS FELT THEY WERE FACED WITH EITHER ISSUING THEIR OWN STRIKE ULTIMATUM OR LOSING SUPPORT OF THE WORKERS TO ASDEICE. NOW THAT BOTH UNIONS ARE COMMITTED TO STRIKE IF THEIR MUTUAL DEMANDS AREN'T MET, THEIR LEADERS HAVE BEGUN MEETING TO COORDINATE THE WORK STOPPAGE.

3. COMMENT: IF, AS NOW SEEMS LIKELY, THE STRIKE COMES OFF, THE SITUATION COULD BECOME UGLY IN A HURRY. HAVING GOTTEN NOTHING IN RETURN FROM THEIR JUNE STRIKE EXCEPT THE DISMISSAL OF EIGHT CO-WORKERS, ICE WORKERS ARE IN A SURLY, FIGHTING MOOD. SITET LEADERS CLAIM PRIVATELY THAT IF ICE, DURING THE FIRST FEW DAYS OF THE STRIKE, KEEPS THE WORKERS FROM PULLING THE POWER SWITCHES AND MANAGES TO KEEP ELECTRICITY FLOWING FROM THE LARGELY AUTOMATED GENERATING FACILITIES, THE UNION WILL THEN RESORT TO SABOTAGE TO CUT THE POWER. THEY CLAIM THAT SHORTLY THEREAFTER FRIENDLY UNIONS WILL SHUT DOWN THE RAILROADS AND THE PORTS IN SUPPORT OF SITET'S DEMANDS.

4. ALL OF THIS COULD BODE ILL FOR THE US EMBASSY. ALREADY, THE EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED REPORTS THAT SOME GOVERNMENT LEADERS, FOLLOWING THE PRACTICE HERE IN LABOR DISPUTES, ARE PRIVATELY BLAMING THE US EMBASSY FOR ACTIVELY
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BACKING SITET AGAINST ICE.
THE PTTI REPRESENTATIVE,
WHO HAS BEEN ADVISING SITET (ALTHOUGH NOT ON THE UNION'S STRIKE DECISION) IS CONSIDERED BY MANY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS TO BE A MEMBER OF THE US MISSION. THESE BELIEFS ARE LIKELY TO BE AIRED PUBLICLY BY THE GOVERNMENT IF AND WHEN THE STRIKE ERUPTS AND THE

COUNTRY'S ELECTRICITY IS CUT OFF.

5. IN CONVERSATIONS WITH THE US EMBASSY, THE
PTTI REPRESENTATIVE, AN AMERICAN CITIZEN, EXPRESSED
HIS CONCERN THAT THE GOVERNMENT MAY PRESS LEGAL
CHARGES AGAINST HIM FOR HIS INVOLVEMENT ON BEHALF
OF SITET. HE SAYS HE WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED AT THIS
ACTION, OR ALTERNATIVELY, THAT HE WOULD BE FACED WITH
A GOVERNMENT DEMAND THAT HE LEAVE THE COUNTRY.
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